

Waukegan News Sun, March 1, 2007

WAUKEGAN -- A final funding formula for the environmental clean-up of Waukegan Harbor was presented to a federal panel and a decision on the funding is expected by late July.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, was joined by Waukegan and Lake County officials in making the presentation to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Legacy Act Technical Review Committee on Tuesday.

"After the expansion of O'Hare Airport, the cleanup of Waukegan Harbor is the most important economic development project in Northeastern Illinois," Kirk said.

Under the proposed plan, \$24 million in federal funding for the project would be matched by \$4 million from the state, \$3 million from Waukegan, \$2.5 million from Lake County and \$3 million from private parties including National Gypsum and LaFarge Corporation.

The committee is now expected to study the clean-up proposal and make a recommendation to the EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office, which will announce a funding decision by the end of July, Kirk said.

"Our final clean-up plan will remove the PCB danger from the harbor, unlocking Waukegan's real potential as a Lake Michigan recreational community," Kirk said.

Sediment sampling showed that Waukegan Harbor was highly contaminated with PCPs from dumping in the in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the early 1990s, an EPA-supervised program eliminated an estimated 90 percent of that pollution. The final clean-up would leave Waukegan Harbor as one of the first Great Lakes

harbors to be environmentally restored, Kirk said.

Kirk said a large percentage of the Waukegan-area population "rarely interacts" with the city's lakefront due to its industrial components. He said the clean-up, combined with the clearing of old OMC buildings and the city's lakefront condo plans should lead to a new perception of the harbor area.

A study by the Northeast-Midwest Institute in Washington, D.C., concluded that the harbor clean-up and subsequent development would increase the community's assessed property valuation by more than \$800 million, producing a ripple effect that would benefit school districts and businesses as well as homeowners.